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AUTHOR	Brown, Tom; McCleary, Lloyd
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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to identify and specify what is meant by competency. It examines the Utah and the New York Approaches and finds three levels of competence in both: categories or broad areas of competence; molar statements that depict identifiable competencies; and the breakdown of competency statements into technical, conceptual, and human components. (Author/DN)

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The Notebook continues to expand its service to institutions of higher learning, school districts, state departments of education, funded projects, and individuals by providing information about developmental work, activities, materials, and an examination of issues and ideas. The Notebook now reaches Australia, Europe, Latin America, Samoa, Guam, and Turkey in addition to locations in most of the states. Work has been reported from Seattle, Washington, to Tampa, Florida; from Glendale and the U. of S. C. in California to Queen's College, New York and Burlington, Vermont; from Minneapolis to Corpus Christi and New Orleans. The problems and the focus of work are surprisingly similar and complementary, and the editorial board and the directors hope that each person will share information, ideas, data, and materials through the Notebook as one means of strengthening the quality of programs everywhere.

This issue contains the annual addition to the annotated bibliography begun in Vol. 1, an editorial by Tom Brown and Lloyd McCleary, an article by Alf Langland on new credentialing standards in the State of Washington, and the Notes of Interest section.

The Notebook welcomes your inquiries, reactions, and contributions.

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TOWARD A CLEARER DEFINITION OF COMPETENCY AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF COMPETENCY DEFINITION

Tom Brown and Lloyd McCleary

Within the past five years speculation, analysis, and some developmental work have taken on the tone that professional training programs can be more precisely defined through what has come to be called the competency-based approach. A variety of prescriptions about what a competency-based approach entails are prominent in the literature, and some critiques of the movement in general have appeared (Harry Broudy, AACTE, and Ralph Tyler, Kappan). McCleary has written about what it is not, (CCBC Notebook), and Ian Bryant, among others, has attacked the notion that behavioral-type objectives should be the basis of program definition (NSPI Newsletter). The Notebook has consistently, I think, taken the editorial position that serious analysis of purposes (objectives), processes, and content is needed and that any efforts that begin with competency statements, behaviorally stated or otherwise, are likely to lead to faulty program development. Indeed, many efforts appear to begin and end with some sort of cataloging of performance statements with no provision for validation, process or content considerations, or program development and assessment.

The larger considerations must wait for a more appropriate time and space, and readers are encouraged to provide that sort of analysis when they can do so with testable programs and evidence to substantiate contentions they may wish to make. The work at Utah in job analysis, panel method of competency definition, and validation using the Quadrant Assessment Model (QAM) have been reported in the literature including the Notebook. The work in New York headed by Ray C. Dethy appears to employ a defensible method for arriving at competency definition. (Certification Alternative Project in Administration/Curriculum.)

Both the Utah approach and the New York approach conceive of three levels: Categories or board areas of competence, molar statements that depict identifiable competencies, and then the breakdown of competency statements into technical, conceptual, and human components. The New York group uses the terms role, responsibilities, and competency indicators. The second level, that of the molar statement of a competency, is the critical one. Once a statement has been agreed upon and validated, and it has been delineated into technical, conceptual, and human components, the process of definition is not ended. Each component is then specified in terms of competency indicators that connote familiarity, understanding, and application levels.

One example of a molar competency statement for which learning modules have been developed and tested is: The instructional supervisor will need to be able to help teachers prepare and use lesson plans. Technical, conceptual, and human components were then identified at the application level.

Application Level. Persons who reach the application level are "practitioners" in terms of the competency; they are capable of performance that is indicative of thorough and easy use of a range of behaviors relating to technical, conceptual, and human components of that competency. An illustration of competency indicators at the application level are:

Technical: The supervisor in training will work with supervisors on the job,

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aiding teachers in the preparation of lesson plans--he will write plans, examine and critique plans written by others, etc.

Conceptual: The supervisor in training will prepare analyses of lesson plans and critique them in terms of model forms. He will relate the analysis to curriculum improvement and to staff development needs and specify the implications of such activity, etc.

Human: The supervisor in training will submit plans to criticism by teachers and other supervisors; he will show evidence of diagnosing and treating problems faced by teachers in the development of such plans, etc.

Understanding Level. At the understanding level, one is referring to partial capability. Persons who reach the understanding level are those who may expect to practice the competency at some undefined future point or have a need to have a great deal of knowledge in the area as part of supervising those who are practitioners of the competency. Listed below are three statements at the understanding level which are based on technical, conceptual, and human competencies.

Technical: The supervisor can take an element of content, specify a learner or learning group, prepare a lesson plan, and "talk through" the lesson or teach it.

Conceptual: The supervisor can analyze the elements in each form of lesson plan and critique them demonstrating that he can re-combine elements into a new form, adapt one or more forms to particular uses, and the like.

Human: The supervisor will examine situations that illustrate how he would work with teachers to 1) teach them lesson planning, 2) work with them cooperatively in preparing lesson plans, (role playing, discussions with supervisors after observation, for example).

At the understanding level, further defined here as partial capability, the learner is asked to achieve intellectual mastery of a given competency. Again, not all learners would be expected to reach this level unless they were or anticipated to be in a position of supervising practitioners in the competency. Partial competence at the understanding level, then, specifies what is negotiated as "important" in program and in an individual's aspirations or professional role.

The familiarity area is treated in a comparable manner, and space will not be devoted to it here. Hopefully, the point has been made that performance definition goes well beyond a simple listing of items that imply competence, and that after careful definition of competence, periodic validation of such definitions is required. Indeed, the final step which appears to be in behavioral terms must be constantly prefaced with the term "indicator of competence" and behavior appropriate to it not assumed to be the competence itself.

This editorial has been limited to the identification and specification of competency. More difficult still are the assessment procedures and the program specifications, although some excellent work has been accomplished with each. Finally, let us not stop with a program composed solely of modules which deal with discrete competencies. Experiences that are relatively unstructured are

necessary for gaining perspective, random reality testing, integrating and relating experiences, and the like. Competency statements may be the place to begin, but they are only a beginning. The difficult, detailed work of program construction based upon competency statements does not in itself provide a complete program sufficient for the professional in education.